

Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City)

October 16, 2004 Saturday

LENGTH: 394 words

HEADLINE: Who would pay federal 'rent?'

BYLINE: Deseret Morning News editorial

BODY:

Any effort to secure more funds for Utah's public schools is worth pursuing. Utah has a very large population of school-age children.

And, since two-third of Utah land is owned by the federal government and not subject to state and local property taxes, that would seem like an attractive place to do some creative fund-raising. Unfortunately, it isn't that easy.

Unlike in the East, where the federal government holds no more than 14 percent of any state's land, Western states are stuck with a lot of land that generates nothing in tax revenue. The big losers are public school students in the West. Per-pupil funding in the western United States is roughly half of that spent on students in the East, a phenomenon that contributes to larger class sizes.

To correct the inequity, Utah's two Republican congressmen, Rob Bishop and Chris Cannon (who are both seeking re-election) want the federal government to pay "rent" on untaxable federal land, some \$100 million a year.

The proposal is a reprisal of the APPLE Initiative introduced two years ago by Marty Stephens, Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives and Rep. Steve Urquhart, R-St. George. APPLE, or **Action Plan for Public Lands and Education**, has stalled in the halls of Congress, but Bishop and Cannon have vowed to continue to push it.

As a matter of basic equity, Utah leaders should pursue this funding. But it shouldn't be viewed as a sure thing because it has to compete among other funding requests in Congress. Other than a coalition of Western states that notably does not include California or Colorado, it has not been demonstrated that most members of Congress embrace this initiative.

Historically, Congress has been stingy with **education** funding, even for its own initiatives. Neither special **education** nor No Child Left Behind have been fully funded.

Another consideration is that a taxpayer is a taxpayer, whether he's filling the federal government's pocket or paying state and local levies. Wouldn't it follow that Western states that seek this relief would end up footing part of the bill? That seems counterproductive.

When it comes to funding Utah's public schools, no stone should be left unturned. But optimism over the APPLE Initiative must be tempered with a sense of history and reality: Congress has an abysmal record in delivering promised funds to the nation's public schools.